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Articles in Today's Clips Wednesday, March 7, 2007

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Published March 7, 2007

Judge orders husband held without bond

Wife's strangulation took five minutes, prosecutor tells court

By Jeff Karoub
Associated Press

MOUNT CLEMENS - A man who police say killed his wife in their suburban Detroit home, dismembered her and deposited her body parts in a nearby park was arraigned Tuesday on charges of first-degree murder and dismemberment of a body.

Stephen Grant, who a day earlier was released from a northern Michigan hospital after being treated for frostbite and hypothermia, entered the courtroom at the Macomb County Jail in a wheelchair. Judge Denis LeDuc entered a not guilty plea on his behalf.

The 37-year-old is charged in the death of his wife, Tara Lynn Grant, after three weeks of steadfastly maintaining his innocence then offering what authorities say was a lengthy, graphic confession.

LeDuc ordered that Grant be held without bond and scheduled a preliminary examination for March 20.

LeDuc approved the prosecutor's request that the charges against Grant be amended to include first-degree, or premeditated, murder, which is punishable by life in prison without the possibility of parole upon conviction. Macomb County Prosecutor Eric Smith said the charge was warranted, because an autopsy indicates that Tara Grant died of manual strangulation, in which the victim typically takes five minutes to die.

"Mr. Grant, I don't think I need to hear anything further with regard to the issue of bond," the judge said. "Given the extreme, extreme seriousness of the charges, the nature of the allegations here, the nature of the alleged flight, the court agrees with the people. I'm going to order you held without bond."

Autopsy results suggest Tara Grant was strangled on Feb. 9, the date she last was seen alive, said Daniel Spitz, the county medical examiner. Smith said her body was dismembered at a tool and die shop where Stephen Grant worked.

A child custody hearing for the two Grant children was scheduled for later Tuesday. Smith said his office planned to petition the family court to take jurisdiction of the children and terminate Stephen Grant's parental rights.

Smith said the Michigan Department of Human Services recommends that the children live with Tara Grant's sister, Alicia Standerfer, and her husband at their home in Chillicothe, Ohio.

Stephen Grant's sister, Kelly Utykanski, of Sterling Heights, and her husband also sought temporary custody of the children.

Utykanski said she wants to maintain good relations with the Standerfers and coordinate care of the children. Utykanski said she gave police the information to help find her brother in northern Michigan.

"I'm not here to give my brother a big hug," she said. "I want him to get his punishment. I just want to make sure he has his (legal) representation and that I'm allowed to visit him."

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Custody Hearing For Grant Children

POSTED: 2:48 pm EST March 6, 2007

UPDATED: 3:03 pm EST March 6, 2007

The juvenile division of the Macomb County Family Court will hold a news conference on Tuesday.

At the conference, a referee will decide what will happen to the children, who are 4 and 6 years old.

Workers for Michigan's Child Protective services office have filed an abuse/neglect petition against Grant. It's presumably based on allegations that he killed his wife in the home while the children were, and that he kept her torso in the garage while the children were there.

The children have been staying with Stephen Grant's sister, but now this case has become a state matter.

A Mount Clemens attorney who has experience in cases like this talked to Local 4 News about how the process works.

"This is a matter of finding what's in the best interest of the children right now," family attorney Donald Aubrey said. "Making sure the children's needs are taken care of, making sure there is a process by which wherever the children are placed that a third party has the ability to provide food, shelter, and can seek medical help for the child."

Aubrey said in very serious cases, protective services asks that a petition be accepted. The petition would include language requesting that a parent's rights be terminated.

If they do file to terminate his parental rights, that process could take a long time -- maybe four months to a year.

Grant will have an attorney appointed to him, and the children will have what's called a Guardian ad Litem representing them.

A Macomb Co. bank is accepting donations for a trust fund set up for the two young children of Tara Lynn Grant and confessed murderer Stephen Grant.

Donations may be sent to:

Care of: Warren Bank 38880 Garfield Road Clinton Township, MI 48038

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March 7, 2007

Court paves way for Grant kids' adoption

The children, 4 and 6, are staying with Tara's sister as the state seeks to end dad's parental rights.

Kim Kozlowski, Jennifer Chambers and Ronald J. Hansen / The Detroit News

MOUNT CLEMENS -- The process that could pave the way for someone to adopt Tara Grant's two children began Tuesday as the state moved to terminate her husband's parental rights now that he faces murder charges in her brutal slaying.

Macomb County Family Court Referee John J. Kennedy suspended Stephen Grant's rights to visit his two children, ages 6 and 4, following a petition by the Michigan Department of Human Services.

The children cannot be adopted until a court terminates Grant's parental rights or he gives them up voluntarily.

"There will be no contact between the natural father and children in any shape, any form, whatsoever," Kennedy said.

The state's petition to terminate Grant's parental rights is based on his potential to care for his children, said his court appointed attorney, Stephen Donovan.

"He's likely to be locked up for a long time and won't be able to care for his children in the near future," Donovan said.

Family members are generally first in line to adopt children when a parent's rights are terminated.

Both Stephen Grant's sister, Kelly Utykanski, and Tara Grant's sister, Alicia Standerfer, will likely seek permanent custody of the children, Donovan said.

"They both feel they are qualified," he said.

Utykanski had been caring for the children on and off since Tara Grant was reported missing on Feb. 14.

Late Monday, Michigan Department of Human Services officials secured an order for custody of the children, so they took the children from Utykanski. They later put them in the temporary care of Standerfer.

Tuesday's hearing continued the placement of the children under the care of the state. They recommended letting Standerfer keep the children until the next hearing, to be held in the next 30 days.

Kennedy ordered that the children remain in Michigan. Standerfer lives in Chillicothe, Ohio, but she was staying at an undisclosed Michigan location.

Standerfer declined comment on whether she would seek permanent custody of the children, noting that the issue of Grant's parental rights could take months to resolve.

Utykanski said she'll seek custody of her brother's children, but ultimately wants what's best for the kids. She said she has a good relationship with Tara's family.

"We hugged each other last night (Monday) and said we love each other; we don't hate each other. There's no animosity there. We're not going to make this into a horrible battle," Utykanski said. "I didn't do anything wrong, so I hope they don't hold this against us. Whoever gets custody of the children, the other (family) wants lots of visitation, and I certainly hope that happens."

You can reach Kim Kozlowski at (313) 222-2024 or kkozlowski@detnews.com.

Help Tara's children

A trust fund has been set up for the college education of the Grant children. Donations can be made to the fund at:

Warren Bank, 38880 Garfield Road, Clinton Township, MI 48038

For information, call (586) 416-1650.

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Grant's children stay with Tara's sister for now

March 6, 2007

By BEN SCHMITT

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

The children of Stephen and Tara Grant will remain in the custody of Tara's sister -- at least for now -- under the supervision of the state Department of Human Services, a Macomb County Juvenile Court referee ruled this afternoon.

Referee John Kennedy said that his order stands until the pretrial hearing, which will be held in Macomb County juvenile court within the next 30 days.

Tara's sister, Alicia Standerfer, and her husband, Erik Standerfer, appeared at the hearing with an attorney, but left without commenting.

Stephen Grant's sister, Kelly Utykanski -- where the two children had been staying until Monday -- also appeared with an attorney, and also left without commenting.

The Grant's two children, a boy and a girl, ages 6 and 4, were not in court during the proceedings.

A court-appointed attorney representing Stephen Grant in the custody hearing, Stephen Donovan, said Grant has been informed about the custody issues and that Grant instructed him to "to tell the court that, at least for now, he has no problem with the current placement."

The state made a motion to terminate Stephen Grant's parental rights at the hearing. Donovan said his client is considering whether to fight the move by the state.

Kennedy, the referee, also ruled that Grant would be denied any visitation from the children throughout the proceedings.

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Stephen Grant's sister: I want him to be punished

Families say they won't haggle over kids' custody

March 7, 2007

BY BEN SCHMITT and CHRISTY ARBOSCELLO

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS

The families who once came together for holidays sat on opposite sides of a courtroom Tuesday, represented by lawyers, the custody of Stephen and Tara Lynn Grant's two children at stake.

Two hours earlier, the families sat in another courtroom. Stephen Grant, clad in black-and-white Macomb County jail garb, was pushed out in a wheelchair for his first appearance before a judge on charges he killed and dismembered his wife and the mother of those kids.

"I'm not here to give him a big hug," said Stephen Grant's sister, Kelly Utykanski. "I want him to get his punishment."

The strain, turmoil and grief surrounding the death of Tara Grant, 34 -- her apparent disappearance weeks ago, the discovery of her remains Friday and Saturday and the arrest of her husband on Sunday -- were on full display Tuesday as their two families began the long and surreal process of sorting out what happens from here.

After Stephen Grant's brief arraignment before District Judge Denis LeDuc played out Tuesday afternoon, a Macomb County juvenile court referee started to consider the difficult custody issues involving the Grants' children, a 4-year-old boy and 6-year-old girl.

They were taken from Utykanski's Sterling Heights home on Monday evening and placed with Tara Grant's sister, Alicia Standerfer, and her husband, Erik, with whom they will stay at least until another hearing within 30 days. Both families were seeking custody of the children, who have been told of their mother's death.

But it doesn't appear to be an acrimonious contest.

"We don't have any animosity toward each other," Utykanski said after her brother's arraignment. "We're not going to make this into a courtroom battle."

Utykanski, who cared for the children during the weekend with her husband, Chris, as her brother ran from the law, spoke lovingly of the Standerfers.

"When we saw them last night, we were hugging them," she said.

The court referee, John J. Kennedy, placed the children under the supervision of the state Department of Human Services, which turned them over to the Standerfers. Until the next court date, the children cannot leave Michigan. The Standerfers' lawyer, Patrick Simasko, declined to reveal their current living arrangements. The Standerfers live in Chillicothe, Ohio, but Alicia grew up in Michigan.

The couple left the court through a side door without comment after the hearing.

"They're going back to be with the children and they would just ask all of the reporters to respect the children's privacy," Simasko said. "They're going to comply with all the rules and regulations."

Kennedy also ruled that Grant, 37, would be denied any visitation with the children in jail throughout the custody proceedings. The state already has petitioned to terminate Grant's parental rights.

Authorities say Grant killed his wife while the children were in the Grant home in Washington Township, probably sleeping.

Grant's court-appointed civil attorney, Stephen Donovan, said his client is considering whether to fight the move.

When informed Tuesday of the custody proceedings, Donovan said Grant "was almost tearful. It was difficult for him." But Donovan said Grant told him he has no problem with the current placement of the children.

"For the longer term, he is thinking about that and we'll talk about that later," Donovan said.

At his arraignment, Grant was polite as a judge read charges of first-degree murder and disinterment and mutilation of a corpse. He had said his wife was missing since Feb. 9 -- the same night authorities say he strangled her and then dismembered her body in his family's machine shop, scattering the remains in a wooded area around Stony Creek Metropark.

Macomb County officials say her torso was found during a search of the Grants' home on Friday, when Grant fled. He apparently brought the torso back to the home after learning officials would search the park.

Other remains were found in the woods Saturday. Grant was captured Sunday morning in Wilderness State Park -- four hours away, at the northwestern tip of the Lower Peninsula. He suffered hypothermia and some frostbite, which is why he was wheeled to and from his arraignment.

Authorities say Grant has confessed to strangling his wife and dismembering her body.

On Tuesday, he nodded as LeDuc explained the charges and said, "Yes, Your Honor," before LeDuc entered a plea of not guilty on his behalf. Detective Sgt. Brian Kozlowski of the Macomb County Sheriff's Office cited a two-hour audiotaped confession to the slaying and cover-up.

"Given the extreme, extreme seriousness of the charges, the nature of the allegations here ... I'm going to order you without bond," LeDuc said.

Grant agreed to have a court-appointed criminal attorney -- it was not clear whether one had been named by Tuesday evening. Before he was wheeled out of court, Grant said, "Thank you, Your Honor."

Kelly Utykanski, his sister, said she wants to ensure his rights are not compromised and she'd like to speak with him about "housekeeping" issues, such as bills. But she's stunned by the turn of events, calling him "the most docile person I saw my whole life."

When he fled to northern Michigan, she said, "he called me on the phone, saying he was suicidal." She immediately contacted police.

Grant isn't eligible to have visitors to the jail until Thursday, according to jail officials.

After the custody hearing, the Standerfers went with a police escort to the Grants' home.

They had to pick up clothes for the children.

Contact **BEN SCHMITT** at 313-223-4296 or bcschmitt@freepress.com. Staff writer Jim Schaefer contributed to this report.

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PUBLISHED: Wednesday, March 7, 2007

Tara's sister awarded custody of Grant kids

Accused wife-killer barred from contact with his two children

By Jameson Cook and Chad Halcom
Macomb Daily Staff Writers

A juvenile court referee Tuesday awarded temporary placement of Tara and Stephen Grant's two young children with Tara's sister, while stripping Stephen Grant of having any contact with them.

Referee John J. Kennedy on Tuesday afternoon approved the placement of the 6-year-old daughter and 4-year-old son of the Grants on behalf of the state Department of Human Services, which determined the children should be with Alicia Standerfer and her husband, Erik, who live in Ohio.

A future custody battle is possible since Stephen Grant's sister, Kelly Utykanski, who resides in Sterling Heights with her husband, Chris, said out of court Tuesday she wants to seek custody of the children. The Utykanskis attended Tuesday's hearing but their attorney was not allowed by Kennedy to speak.

The permanent placement will be decided at a later time. Stephen Grant's parental rights could be terminated through Family Court, which at the earliest would be scheduled in 30 days.

Grant has not decided whether to contest the termination, said his court-appointed attorney, Stephen Donovan.

Grant, 37, was formally charged Tuesday with first-degree premeditated murder and mutilation of a corpse for the Feb. 9 strangling death of his 34-year-old wife in their Washington Township home and the dismemberment of her body. Police say he dumped her remains in a wooded area near their home and reported her missing Feb. 14. He was arrested Sunday morning in northern Michigan.

The children were at home and believed to be sleeping at the time of the slaying.

Despite her wishes to raise the children, Kelly Utykanski emphasized that her family and Tara's relatives are maintaining a civil and cordial relationship during the pending custody and placement proceedings.

"Both families love these children. We understand that," she said. "And whichever family ends up with custody, we would want to see plenty of visitation time to the other family as well."

She also declined to respond to or counter some statements this week by Alicia Standerfer that the children were "not doing well" this week as the state Department of Human Resources removed them from the Grant family, and they were contending with their mother's death.

"We're not going to make comments about whether the children are doing well that way," she said. "When they were with us, they were happy and healthy."

Donovan said, "There has been not too much acrimony that I have seen."

Representing the DHS in its petition to place the children with the Standerfers at the hearing was assistant Macomb County prosecutor John Ange.

The DHS will make a final determination of where to place the children and will make a recommendation to the juvenile court. Anyone with an interest, such as Kelly Utykinski, could fight the recommendation.

The grandparents of the children did not appear at the hearing.

Melissa King, court-appointed attorney to represent the children's interests, said Tuesday after the hearing that she expects the DHS will decide that the placement will include adoption.

"It's always a goal to put them in a family-like setting," she said, as opposed to foster care, which is usually short term.

A party also can request to have the case heard by a Family Court judge housed at the circuit court building in downtown Mount Clemens instead of a referee.

Over the next month, the DHS will evaluate the living conditions and family environment of Tara's surviving sister and only sibling, Macomb County Prosecutor Eric Smith said. Although the children cannot leave the state while the review process is pending, Smith said he believes the family can keep the children in the area with relatives.

"Our understanding is they do have family in the tri-county area, and these relatives are known to the children, and that shouldn't be a problem to stay with those relatives at least while this process is pending," Smith said. "There's no indication they'd have to live in a hotel or anything just to comply with that request."

Smith was also confident the Standerfer family residence in Chilicothe, Ohio, would prove a suitable home environment and the family should be able to obtain permanent custody.

King said the differing geographic placement of the children should not be the determining factor for placement because both scenarios carry "pluses and minuses."

Being far away from Macomb County may remove them from the proximity of the tragic events involving their mother and father, but it may take away familiarity and family.

King noted that due to heavy media coverage, "The children won't be insulated even if they move to another state."

The maneuvers to terminate Stephen Grant's parental rights and make the children wards of the court, Smith said, are grounded in some part on the incriminating evidence that the father had harmed the mother in the home while the children were present. There is no evidence as yet the children were awake at the time or knew what was taking place when Tara allegedly died, officials have said.

King asked the referee to close Tuesday's hearing to the public, but he denied the request.

In prohibiting Stephen Grant from having contact with his children, Kennedy said from the bench that Grant is "in police custody and has been charged."

"The general acts of his behavior put his children at risk and are officially removed from under his care," Kennedy said.

Tuesday's decisions become official in seven days, and there is a 14-day day time period for an appeal, Kennedy said.

Donovan, Grant's attorney, said he met with Stephen Grant following his arraignment in the early afternoon.

Donovan said Grant appeared upset, "almost tearful," about not being able to see his children.



Donations for kids rise sharply after mention on 'Larry King'

By Chad Halcom
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

Community and nationwide interest in the Tara Grant case has begun to focus on the victim's children who have lost their mother to a grisly crime and a father to possible life imprisonment.

Officials said Tuesday donations have already started coming in for a special Grant Children's Trust Fund to help the family who gains custody of Grant's 6-year-old daughter and 4-year-old son with future expenses such as possible college tuition costs.

"It's mainly to foster their education and development," said attorney Patrick Simasko, who represents the family of Grant's sister, Alicia Standerfer, in a juvenile court petition for custody of the two children. "I suppose it could also be for any emergencies or unforeseen expenses in caring for them, I don't want to say it's not for that, but we'll work some of that out."

Vince Viviano, a loan officer at Warren Bank handling the trust fund, said Tuesday that a handful of donations so far have come in -- mostly from established bank customers. But interest and phone calls started pouring in from around the country shortly after the fund was mentioned on CNN's "Larry King Live" during interviews about the Grant case.

"We had messages, since we were closed then, but (calls started) coming around the time of the program until about 2 a.m., and then some this morning," he said. "Callers from New York, Florida, from Washington, D.C., and this is something that just got started."

Simasko and others connected to the fund said it was an idea of Macomb County Prosecutor Eric Smith and was arranged with the cooperation with the Standerfer family. Smith apparently drew some inspiration from the very successful Alexandra and Ashley Memorial Fund established in memory of the two daughters allegedly killed by Macomb Township mother Jennifer Kukla on Feb. 4, officials handling the fund said.

That fund raised more than \$30,000 before bank officials finally closed the account. It covered all the expenses of the funeral for the struggling relatives of those children. Some money is also to be allocated toward a memorial playscape in the children's names at Ojibwa elementary school.

"I know a lot of us are having hard (economic) times in Macomb County, but I suppose none of us are having quite as hard a time as the children of Tara Grant right now," Smith said Tuesday of the fund.

Simasko and Viviano both explained the establishment of the fund comes with an understanding that whoever obtains custody or supervises the assets of the Grant children's estate before they reach the age of majority may have to manage or hold that fund in trust as well.

The Macomb County prosecutor's office, on behalf of the state Department of Human Services, has brought a petition to terminate the parental rights and assign custody away from Grant's husband, Stephen C. Grant of Washington Township, who remains at the Macomb County Jail without bond on first-degree murder and corpse mutilation charges in Mrs.

Grant's death.

Two aunts of the children, Kelly Utykanski of Sterling Heights, who is Grant's sister; and Alicia Standerfer of Ohio, who is Mrs. Grant's sister, have both obtained attorneys and are seeking custodial and/or visitation rights to the children in those proceedings at Macomb County Juvenile Court.

Contributions in memory of Tara or for the children can be made to the Grant Children's Trust Fund, c/o Warren Bank, at 38880 Garfield Road, Clinton Township, MI 48038, or arranged by phone at (586) 416-1650.

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Man Accused Of Torture Turns Self In

POSTED: 3:59 pm EST March 5, 2007
UPDATED: 4:47 pm EST March 5, 2007

Stephen Duane Keels, who is accused of torturing his girlfriend's 1-year-old son, turned himself in Monday morning, Pontiac police said.

Police said he is expected to be arraigned sometime Monday afternoon.

On Feb. 28, investigators said they found 10 burns on the child's legs, neck and abdomen, and added that they believe Keels burned the child with a cigarette lighter.

Keels originally told his girlfriend the baby removed a cigarette from an ashtray and burned himself.

Prosecutors said Keels, 28, will be charged with torture, child abuse, and assault with intent to do great bodily harm.

Previous Story:

- February 28, 2007: [Police: Man Burns Girlfriend's Child With Lighter](#)

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Abuse victim's story touches students

Athens High picks his charity for fund-raising week

March 7, 2007

BY GINA DAMRON

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

It was Chip St. Clair's story of childhood abuse, lies and neglect that encouraged students at Troy Athens High School to rally around him and the nonprofit organization he runs.

The student congress picked Justice for Children's Michigan chapter -- which seeks to raise awareness about child abuse and advocates for children's issues -- as the target for its annual school-wide fund-raiser, which collected more than \$26,000 last week.

The congress, which interviews groups hoping to benefit from the school's fund-raiser, chose Justice for Children, which is based in Houston and has a chapter in Birmingham, out of a pool of applicants that included the Make-A-Wish Foundation and the Salvation Army.

"We wanted to make a big impact instead of making a small dent," senior Youngkey Chung, 17, said before the charity week concluded.

St. Clair's personal story set him apart from the rest, students said.

For years, St. Clair, now 31, lived in a home with an abusive father. But, one night in 1998, at his parents' home in Auburn Hills, the violence and deceit came to a head. St. Clair said his father attacked him during an argument, dislocating his shoulder. He called his aunt seeking advice and found out his father was a fugitive, living a lie for 30 years.

She told him his father was convicted of stomping a 3-year-old to death in 1970, but broke of a prison in Indiana in 1973. Chip St. Clair told police and severed ties with his parents. Now, St. Clair is director for the Michigan chapter of Justice for Children. "I've never had experience with anyone who's been abused," said junior Alexandria Heitzer, 17, treasurer of the student congress. "It really woke me up to what's out there."

St. Clair said that the money, most of which came from student donations, will go toward programming and legislative initiatives. The nonprofit has been struggling financially, he said.

"We know it's going to a good cause," said senior Ruby Lakshmanan, 17, vice president of the congress. "We thought it was, like, really heartwarming."

Contact **GINA DAMRON** at 248-351-3293 or gdamron@freepress.com.

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Police Issue Amber Alert

POSTED: 6:12 pm EST March 6, 2007
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KENTWOOD, Mich. -- Kentwood police, near Grand Rapids, said 33-year-old Michael Jones has abducted two children.

They are 2-year-old Ethan Gray and Tiffany Rockingham-Jones, who is less than 1-year-old.

They were last seen at 3 p.m. and police said they are in extreme danger.

Michael Jones is 6 feet 2-inches, 170 pounds, with brown eyes and black hair.

Ethan Gray is 2 feet tall, 35 pounds and has brown eyes and black hair.

Tiffany weighs 13 pounds and has black hair and brown eyes.

They may be riding in a black Ford Taurus, license number WVQ 207.

If you spot them, you're asked to call 911.

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Children found

Wednesday, March 07, 2007

KENTWOOD -- A man who threatened two children during an argument Tuesday with his girlfriend, prompting a statewide Amber Alert, was located and the children were unharmed, police said. Michael Christopher Jones, 33, was found about three hours after he allegedly forced the children's mother from a car about 4:30 p.m. along 28th Street SE near East Paris Avenue, Kentwood authorities say. The mother of Tiffany Rockingham-Jones, 2 months, and Ethan Christopher Gray, 2, reported the children abducted from a drug store parking lot, but was unable to help provide police with a possible destination for Jones since neither are from the Grand Rapids area. The couple, from the Detroit area, were in Kentwood visiting, police said. Kentwood Police Sgt. Richard Roberts said Jones, who was found in the 3200 block of Lancashire Court SE, was arrested and held in the Kent County Jail on a charge of felonious assault. He was to be arraigned today.

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Article published Mar 6, 2007

Teen gets juvenile detention time for attack at Franklin

by Rebecca Jones

The 17-year-old who slammed a classmate on his head in the Franklin High School cafeteria in November was sentenced to juvenile detention Tuesday.

The defendant will remain in custody until he is 21 or the court decides he is rehabilitated.

He must also pay restitution for the victim's medical bills, including a \$7,000 helicopter ride to Ann Arbor, where the 16-year-old victim was treated for a skull fracture.

The victim's mother, Debra Carlin, said she still doesn't know why the defendant attacked her son on Nov. 22.

"My son states that he never even knew him," Debra Carlin said in court at the Lincoln Hall of Juvenile Justice. She asked Judge Jerome Cavanagh to go beyond the sentencing recommendation of probation for the first-time offender.

The defendant, who is not being named because he was charged as a juvenile, pleaded guilty to assault with intent to do great bodily harm less than murder. He had been charged with assault with intent to murder.

The assault took place before school began. It was reportedly precipitated by a text message exchange a few days earlier between the victim and a friend of the defendant.

Cavanagh said it doesn't matter what circumstances led to the attack.

"This was unprovoked," Cavanagh said, addressing the defendant. "The action you took to resolve this dispute was egregious and outrageous."

The defendant will be placed in what was described as a low-level security residential facility. The teen, who has been attending Oak Park High School since mid-December, will have periodic hearings in court to determine his progress. He must also write letters of apology.

"What I did in the past, I'm sorry for," the defendant told the judge. "This is the first big problem that I've ever been into. I don't look for trouble."

He said he had a C-average and hoped to study computers in college.

"I was not impressed with his speech," Debra Carlin said. "I don't think he fully comprehends what he did to Nathan."

Nate Carlin, who returned to school less than a week after the assault, still suffers from hearing problems, she said.

"I wanted him to go to juvy," said Nate Carlin, who sat side-by-side his twin sister during the court proceeding.

rrjones@hometownlife.com | (734) 953-2054



Troubled youth service to centralize

Tuesday, March 06, 2007

By Julie Makarewicz

The Grand Rapids Press

KENTWOOD -- Wedgwood Christian Services wants to build the first of four buildings in Kentwood that will help to consolidate its campuses.

A 24-bed facility for teens, on 5 acres north of the campus at 36th Street and Shaffer Avenue SE, is the first phase of a plan to consolidate its programs, now spread among facilities in Kentwood, Cutlerville and Wyoming.

The initial effort will affect the Wyoming facility.

The nonprofit gained approvals for the project, which could span 10 years, in late 2005.

"It's going to be the same program, the same staff, just transitioning from one site to another," said Randy Zylstra, chief operating officer for Wedgwood.

"It's just no longer cost-effective to operate two sites," he said.

Wedgwood treats troubled youth and provides services from the 36th Street location, Pine Rest Christian Mental Health campus on 68th Street in Cutlerville and a facility on Byron Center Avenue in Wyoming.

Zylstra said the Wyoming facility is for sale, but will not be vacated until the new site is up and running.

Paul Nydam, facilities manager, said residents in this type of facility usually attend public schools. Many have part-time jobs and often rely on public transportation.

Nydam said there is a ratio of four juveniles to every counselor. In general, he said, youths stay at this type of facility anywhere from a few months to a year.

"These kids are subject to staff monitoring at all times," he said.

The proposed 2,670-square-foot building will be able to house up to 12 males and 12 females.

The Kentwood campus, which includes administrative offices, has five residential living centers, with about 60 beds.

Kentwood planning commissioners have to consider the site plan and a special land use permit for a child care institution.

They encouraged Wedgwood officials to meet with neighbors and inform them of the plans before the Planning Commission public hearing at 7:30 p.m. March 13 in City Hall.

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Sex-abuse scandal jolts Texas juvenile system

Crimes, cover-ups alleged at prisons

March 7, 2007

BY ALICIA A. CALDWELL

ASSOCIATED PRESS

PYOTE, Texas -- For at least two years, investigators say, boys at a juvenile prison in the west Texas desert were summoned from their dorms late at night and taken to darkened conference rooms, offices and ball fields for sex with two of the institution's top administrators.

The boys told their parents, their teachers, any staff member who would listen. A few diligent staff members took their complaints to their supervisors. But the allegations were largely covered up until last month, when they exploded in the biggest scandal ever to engulf the Texas juvenile prison system.

The top two officials at the Texas Youth Commission have lost their jobs over their handling of the allegations. Prosecutors are looking into criminal charges. Lawmakers are infuriated. "What scares me the most is what I don't know," said state Sen. John Whitmire, who chairs the Criminal Justice Committee.

Police went to 22 Texas Youth Commission facilities and the agency headquarters Tuesday to investigate more claims that young inmates were sexually abused and that agency officials covered it up.

Jay Kimbrough, appointed by the governor to look into the allegations at the West Texas State School in Pyote, said the officers would conduct interviews, secure equipment and collect documents if necessary.

Horror stories

The allegations became public when the Dallas Morning News cited a never-released 2005 Texas police report that said 13 boys were molested at the West Texas State school. Since then, others have come forward with allegations of sexual abuse at other juvenile prisons across Texas.

Lawmakers were outraged to learn that the two men accused of molesting boys at the West Texas State School -- Ray Brookins, an assistant superintendent who temporarily ran the place, and Principal John Paul Hernandez -- were quietly allowed to resign in 2005 with no criminal charges.

Attempts to reach Hernandez and Brookins by telephone and at their homes were unsuccessful. Hernandez previously denied wrongdoing.

The Texas Youth Commission oversees 7,500 youths ages 10 to 21 -- including some of the most dangerous offenders -- and runs 15 prisons, nine halfway houses and many treatment and counseling centers.

Among the parents to come forward with horror stories since the scandal broke is Genger Galloway, who told lawmakers this week that her 19-year-old son finally told her Saturday about abuse he suffered when he was held at a juvenile prison in central Texas at age 15.

"They've tried to figure out why he's so angry and why he's so hurt and why he won't talk," Galloway said. "And it's because he doesn't feel safe in there."

Galloway said her son, who has been jailed for molesting his siblings, was sexually assaulted by a female staff member and beaten and sodomized by a male inmate in 2003.

Repercussions

Since the scandal broke in February, Texas Youth Commission Executive Director Dwight Harris has resigned, board chairman Pete C. Alfaro has been fired, and Lemuel (Chip) Harrison, who led the West Texas State School when the abuses allegedly occurred before he was promoted to one of four directors of juvenile corrections, has been suspended.

Youth commission spokesman Tim Savoy acknowledged mistakes at the West Texas State School. "When you take a number of years and condense it down to a concise report, you can easily see how it all fits together," Savoy said.

At the west Texas prison, acting Superintendent Curtis Simmons said last week that what happened two years ago "was a shame, but it is no reflection on what we do" now.

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Published March 7, 2007

Caregiver charged in death of woman

Case a result of routine probe of 94-year-old's Jan. 10 death

By Matthew Miller
Lansing State Journal

For 16 years, Ira Clinton Gudith was Margaret Robinson's caregiver.

Now, he's charged with killing the 94-year-old woman.

The case began as a routine investigation into Robinson's Jan. 10 death.

According to Ingham County Chief Medical Examiner Dean Sienko, any death in a private residence automatically generates a call to his office.

In Robinson's case, the medical examiner investigator charged with looking into her death was Connie McQuaid. On looking through the woman's medical records, McQuaid found "documentation that was very disconcerting in terms of medical and psychosocial factors that contribute to a person's well being and quality of life."

She notified Lansing police; a subsequent investigation led to Gudith, 49, who had lived with Robinson in a small tan house in the 600 block of West Mt. Hope Avenue in Lansing.

At a Tuesday afternoon news conference, Sienko would not say how Robinson died, citing the ongoing investigation into the case.

Nor would Ingham County Prosecutor Stuart Dunning III reveal what, exactly, had aroused suspicions against Gudith, who also has been charged with first- and second-degree vulnerable adult abuse.

Robinson had no family, McQuaid said.

Board reviews elder deaths

Ingham County Prosecutor Stuart Dunning III, Chief Medical Examiner Dean Sienko and Lansing Police Chief Mark Alley said the case brought Tuesday against Ira Clinton Gudith was the first success for the county's newly formed Elder Death Review Board.

The multiagency body - which is so newly formed that its name is still in flux - is tasked with looking into suspicious deaths of senior citizens.

"Many counties have child death review teams, but the idea of an elder death review team is a very new concept," Sienko said, adding that Genesee and Ingham are the only counties in Michigan to have one.

Lansing police Detective Traci Ruiz is co-chairwoman of the board, which was formed in December.

"Our seniors are the most vulnerable population out there, along with our children," she said. "We have a lot of systems in place that will help with child abuse ... but the segment of the population that's missing is our seniors."

Sienko said the board would not review most deaths, "because most of them are not suspicious."

"But if there are any suspicions, we will bring it before this group."

- From staff writer Matthew Miller

What's next

- A preliminary hearing for Ira Clinton Gudith, 49, is scheduled for March 20 in 54-A District Court. The hearing determines whether the case advances to trial.

"She apparently survived her siblings. She did not have any children," McQuaid said. "She never married. (She was) completely alone."

Dunnings would not say how Gudith came to be her caregiver but did say he was not employed by a home-care agency.

He said that Gudith and Robinson shared a house with roommates, though he would not say how many or what their relationship was to the victim or the man charged with killing her.

And he said that Gudith was already in custody when the prosecutor's office filed charges.

He had been arrested last week on a domestic violence charge.

A man who answered the door at Gudith's house Tuesday evening declined to answer questions about the case.

Gudith did not respond to a message seeking comment left at the Ingham County Jail.

Contact Matthew Miller at 377-1046 or mrmiller@lsj.com.

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Elderly Deaths Being Investigated More Closely

March 6, 2007 04:27 PM EST

Thousands of people die in Ingham County every year, and most of them are elderly, but county investigators say they can't just assume these deaths are due to natural causes.

Dr. Dean Sienko, Ingham County Medical Examiner: "We wanna be accurate as best we can in identifying the cause and manner of death."

That has Ionia County officials coming together to prevent some of society's most vulnerable people from falling victim to murder.

Dr. Dean Sienko: "This requires a combination of support, law enforcement, and prosecutors and health officials."

The new program, being called the elderly death review board, has various agencies involved in a death investigation making sure suspicious elderly deaths are fully examined.

Dr. Dean Sienko: "There are a lot of advocates for child abuse and for domestic violence, but we don't have much out there for the senior community or vulnerable adults, and I thought this was a necessity."



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Wednesday, 03/07/07

DCS faulted for moving kids *Advocacy group also determines agency has improved foster care*

By SHEILA BURKE

Tennessean Staff Writer

Children are being shuffled from one foster home to another. Caseworkers aren't visiting the kids enough. And about a third of child-welfare cases "contained significant gaps in documentation."

But the state, through the Department of Children's Services, has made great strides with foster children in other areas.

Those findings by a group that monitors Tennessee's foster-care program were filed in a federal court in Nashville on Tuesday. Since 2001, Tennessee's foster-care system has been under a court order to reform its treatment of some of the state's most vulnerable children.

The report looked at how children are treated in the first six months after they come into the foster-care system in Tennessee. Most had been taken from their families because of abuse and neglect.

It found that more than half had moved at least twice during the six months, and 18 percent had been placed in three or more homes during that time.

"That level of multiple moves is just unacceptable," said Ira Lustbader, an attorney for Children's Rights, a New-York based advocacy group that initiated a class-action lawsuit against DCS that was settled with the court order.

"We've got to see more stability for these children."

DCS agrees.

"Some of the challenges we've got are with placement stability," DCS spokesman Rob Johnson said. "One of the things we're working hard to do is limit the number of times a child moves when a child comes into custody."

The department is working to get more foster parents, which would help limit the number of times a child has to move.

The report also faulted DCS because only a little more than half of the children in foster care received required visits by caseworkers during their first eight weeks in custody. Seventy-six percent received the required visits after eight weeks.

The report found that DCS had made conditions better for children, including moving kids out of orphanage-like institutions and into foster families and keeping more kids together with their siblings.

The number of children in state custody also has significantly decreased. There were 10,600 kids in DCS custody in early 2004. There are now roughly 8,700 in the system.

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When I read this article my first thought was "Are they talking about the same DCS I know?". I am not disputing that perhaps SOME changes have been made and I suppose you MUST start somewhere. BUT the changes are not significant and when children's lives are at stake they still register on the unacceptable range of the scale. I get so frustrated with DCS that I disconnect out of protection for my emotions. I wonder how many others are like me? And they wonder why it is difficult to recruit good, loving, positive Foster Parents. Apathy fueled by their lack of understanding is the core problem.

I am a public relations executive for a living and I can honestly say I would HATE to

have DCS as a client since there is very little positive to spin about them. Whoever placed this Tennessean article earned their retainer for the month!

Posted: Wed Mar 07, 2007 6:57 am

One thing you have to hand it to DCS for: they sure talk a good game. They continue to move children from home to home without consideration for the best interests of the child. One of the consequences of that that is not mentioned in the article is that the children are often moved from one school district to another many times at places in the semester that makes it impossible for the child to earn any credits from either school district. This is done more often than DCS would like to admit. Another problem with DCS is that the workers simply do not know the children. They show up at the schools demanding educational services for the children that are inappropriate for the individual child and usually without any paperwork to back up their claims. If they had been making their visits as they should have they would have more likely been aware of the inappropriateness of what they were arguing for. Instead they disagree with school officials specifically trained on the subject of what is and isn't appropriate for the child who can't substantiate what the DCS worker claims because the educational paperwork is, many times, three schools behind the child. They argue so vociferously at the school because at the school there is an audience and they use that time to show how much they "care" for their charge. When eyes aren't upon them, such as home visits, paperwork following the child, or deciding on moving the child from home to home they aren't nearly as concerned. Like I said at the beginning: DCS sure talks a good game but where the rubber meets the road the three stooges could do at least an equally good job.

Posted: Wed Mar 07, 2007 6:11 am

Montel Brings Prescription Bus To Town

MIRS, March 6, 2007

Republican and Democratic leaders rallied around talk show host Montel **WILLIAMS** today to support the Partnership for Prescription Assistance (PPA) program, which is a national program that helps poor people get access to prescription drugs.

Williams, who has multiple sclerosis, is the famous face behind the program and travels all around the country to drum up awareness for the program. The PPA program brings a bus to different parts of the country to sign people up for the program.

Most people who are eligible for the program end up getting free prescription drugs. The others pay a small amount for the drugs they need. This is the fifth time the PPA bus has come to Michigan.

Senate Majority Leader Mike **BISHOP** (R-Rochester) and Department of Community (DCH) Director Janet **OLSZEWSKI** joined Williams at the podium to offer their support for the program.

The DCH has added a link to its Web site promoting PPA. After talking about the PPA, Olszewski talked about other programs Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** has started that are helping poor people get health care.

First she talked about the Governor's Michigan prescription program, which has helped 42,000 citizens get access to prescription drugs since 2004. This program includes at least 10 other states. Michigan pools its resources with these states to negotiate lower prescription drug prices.

"One reason that Michigan Rx exists is because of the partnership with this program," Olszewski said.

Olszewski also talked about the Governor's Michigan First Health Care plan, which would help get health insurance for the state's poorest citizens. Olszewski once again said that she thinks the state will get the federal waiver it needs to start the program by the spring.

03/07/2007

News in brief

Woman pleads in embezzlement case

FROM STAFF REPORTS

GAYLORD — A Vanderbilt woman will spend a month in the county lockup after pleading guilty to attempted embezzlement from a homeless shelter in Otsego County.

Rhonda Berdan, 43, is the former director of the Friendship Shelter near Gaylord and was sentenced Monday by Judge Dennis Murphy in 46th Circuit Court in Gaylord. She will spend 30 days in jail, two years on probation and must pay initial restitution of \$2,133, plus \$420 in court costs and fees.

Berdan initially was charged with multiple counts of embezzlement and fraud, but charges were reduced in a plea agreement. Another hearing will be scheduled to determine whether any further restitution will be required, court officials said.

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Training adults

New state program, proposal must prepare jobless for work

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, March 07, 2007

While government job-training programs for adults have a checkered history of effectiveness, teaching skills to the unemployed theoretically is worthwhile.

Therefore, Gov. Jennifer Granholm's "No Worker Left Behind" proposal and a similar initiative targeting welfare recipients deserve encouragement - and scrutiny. Experience says they must be well-designed and managed if meaningful employment is to be achieved.

The most ambitious of these ideas is the former, a plan Granholm unveiled in her State of the State speech in February. She wants to give people who've lost their jobs up to two free years of study at a community college or training school.

Presumably, there'll be sufficient state and federal work force development funding for the program to serve the 100,000 people Granholm anticipates. But as with all such programs, the human factor is the bigger hurdle. Those giving the training must place their clients in appropriate study and then deliver on what's promised.

The latter goes double for the Job, Education and Training - JET - program, as its target population of welfare recipients probably lack much work history. Nevertheless, pilots run in four counties, including Oakland, showed promise that Genesee County's version could reduce caseloads here. Marianne Udow, director of the state Department of Human Services, claims that JET's support and training components amount to a profoundly improved system for moving people to self-sufficiency.

Time will tell for both of these training efforts aiming to reduce Michigan's skills deficit, part of Granholm's broader vision for transforming the state's economy. While a stronger K-12 curricula prods the next generation of workers, these two programs focus on older residents who've fallen through the cracks. May the state's performance be up to the challenge.

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States Say Welfare Rules Prevent Self-Sufficiency

Many People Stuck In Low-Paying Jobs

POSTED: 6:23 pm EST March 6, 2007

WASHINGTON -- New welfare rules make it harder for states to move people from public assistance to self-sufficiency, state officials told Congress on Tuesday.

Stricter work requirements limit opportunities for education programs or vocational training, leaving many welfare recipients stuck in low-paying jobs, they said. Also, the requirements are difficult to meet for people with disabilities or substance-abuse problems.

"I urge you to take steps to return greater flexibility to the states," said Robin Arnold-Williams, Washington state's secretary of social and health services.

"Allow us to return our focus to connecting parents to the labor market so they can increase their family income, support their children and provide a better life for themselves and their family," she told the House subcommittee that oversees welfare issues.

Nancy K. Ford, Nevada's welfare administrator, said that after years of reducing welfare rolls, people still getting payments are among the hardest to place in jobs.

"They are not trained, they are not educated and we need to make them attractive to employers," Ford said.

Congress overhauled the welfare system in 1996, requiring most recipients to work or leave welfare but allowing them to continue to get some benefits after they started working.

The law imposed a five-year limit on cash payments for most people in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, or TANF. Some states enacted shorter time limits.

The number of people receiving cash welfare benefits has plummeted by about 60 percent since 1996. But other government programs for the poor, including Medicaid, food stamps and disability benefits, are bursting with new enrollees.

As a result, nearly one in six people rely on some form of government aid. That is a larger share than at any time since the government started measuring two decades ago.

The 1996 law required states to have at least half of their single-parent TANF recipients in "work activities," such as a job or vocational training. State had flexibility to define work activities, and they got credits for people who had left welfare after 1995, regardless of whether they were working.

The credits allowed states to become lax in requiring welfare recipients to work, with only 32 percent of TANF families engaged in work-related activities in 2004, said Sidonie Squier, director of the federal office that oversees welfare programs.

"It was time to reverse this trend so that all TANF recipients would have the opportunity to become self-sufficient," Squier told the subcommittee.

When Congress renewed the welfare law last year, it enacted stricter work requirements and eliminated credits for people who left welfare before 2005.

Preliminary rules from the Health and Human Services Department in June defined which activities would count as work. Job training and rehabilitation programs can count toward work requirements, but only for limited periods.

Final rules are expected in September and states will be required to adhere to them by October, Squier said. States that do not meet the new requirements could lose millions of dollars in federal money and be required to spend more state money on welfare programs.

Rep. Jim McDermott, D-Wash., chairman of the House subcommittee that oversees welfare issues, said he plans to work on legislation

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this year giving states more flexibility to meet the new work requirements.

But Georgia's director of the division of family and children services said her state will have no problem meeting the new requirements.

"For those who say it can't be done, we're doing it," said Mary Dean Harvey. "For those who say it might hurt families, I would simply ask, 'what can hurt a family more than persistent dependence and low expectations?'"

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Mar 7, 11:14 AM EST

Report: 8 state programs could be in jeopardy because of Prop 2

By [TIM MARTIN](#)
[Associated Press Writer](#)

LANSING, Mich. (AP) -- Eight of 45 state programs or statutes reviewed could be in jeopardy or in need of changes because of a new state law banning some public affirmative action practices, according to a report adopted Wednesday by the Michigan Civil Rights Commission.

They are connected to the state's department for Spanish speaking affairs, women and minority business owners, foster care and special needs adoptions, higher education and collective bargaining programs.

But many state programs aimed at diversity can continue without changes, according to the report, which makes recommendations to Gov. Jennifer Granholm and the state Legislature. The commission reviewed 45 programs or statutes members felt might be in jeopardy, but only about 18 percent were believed to be in jeopardy, the commission report said.

Proposal 2, approved by voters in November, bans the use of race and gender preferences in university admissions and government hiring. The law took effect Dec. 23.

Officials at Michigan's public universities say they are complying or attempting to comply with the new law. The University of Michigan, for example, says it no longer is considering race or gender in its admissions. Other universities have changed program names or policies to adapt to the new requirements.

Kangas begins term on Gogebic County Human Services Board

Published Tuesday, March 6, 2007 4:22:01 PM Central Time

IRONWOOD -- Marie Kangas was sworn in Feb. 12 as a member of the Gogebic Department of Human Services Board.

Kangas was appointed to replace Steve Thomas, whose term ended when he was elected to the Ironwood Area School District Board of Education. Her term runs through Oct. 31, 2009.

She said she was proud to have been selected for this position and looks forward to serving the people of Gogebic County.

Kangas is a retired educator who has coordinated Even Start Family Literacy Programs and Integrated Family Services for the Ironwood schools. She has a bachelor of science degree in human services from Northern Michigan University.

She is president of the Little Finland Auxiliary, on the board of the Children's Trust Fund Child Protection Council, chairwoman of the U.P. Community Coordinated Child Care, a member of the Gogebic County Crisis Response Team and the Michigan State University Extension Gogebic County Council.

Kangas and her husband James Kangas live near Little Girl's Point.